

In this Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2020, file photo, President-elect Joe Biden speaks at a drive-in rally for Georgia Democratic candidates for U.S. Senate Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, in Atlanta.

Associated Press
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Washington braces for intense opening to a pivotal year



In this Monday, Dec. 14, 2020, file photo, Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger speaks during a news conference in Atlanta.

Associated Press

By WILL WEISSERT

Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del.

(AP) — The tumult of 2020 isn't over yet.

The opening week of the new year will be dominated by a collision of events that will test America's commitment to democracy, shape President-elect Joe Biden's incoming administration and determine the future of the Republican Party.

It begins on Tuesday with two runoff elections in Georgia that will decide control of the Senate. Biden's ability to easily set up his Cabinet and enact a legislative agenda hinges on Democrats capturing both seats.

The focus shifts to Washington on Wednesday, where Congress is set to certify Biden's victory in the Electoral College. The typically procedural afterthought is now a battle as some Republicans, eager to satisfy President Donald Trump's most loyal supporters, say they won't certify the results of a free and fair election. Others in the GOP are warning that such moves are destructive.

Trump, who spent part of the weekend pleading with Georgia's election chief to

overturn Biden's win there, has suggested he may make some type of appearance at demonstrations expected in Washington on Wednesday. Some of the protesters who have indicated they will be in the city have ties to white supremacy.

Even in a capital that has become somewhat accustomed to the chaos of the Trump era, the tension heading into this week is particularly acute. The repercussions could be long-lasting, influencing the course of Biden's administration and ultimately the American resolve to peacefully transfer power from one party to another.

"We will be reading about this in history books for decades," said Democratic strategist Andrew Feldman who works with labor and progressive organizations. "Anyone who thought that Trump would cede control of the Republican Party post-an election loss is just dead wrong. This is still very much, and I think will continue to be, Trump's GOP." Biden spent the weekend at his vacation house on the Delaware coast and has largely shrugged off concerns about the coming week. He plans to an-

nounce additional Cabinet picks soon in a sign that he's preparing to assume the presidency on Jan. 20. But the holiday weekend demonstrated some of the challenges ahead.

In a sign of the hostility coursing through American politics, vandals targeted the homes of congressional leaders from both parties. Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's door in Kentucky was spray painted with derogatory phrases while someone left graffiti, a pig's head and fake blood at the San Francisco home of Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

And Trump's Saturday conversation with Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a fellow Republican, was an unprecedented effort by a sitting president to pressure a state official to reverse the outcome of an election. Trump pressed Raffensperger to "find" enough votes for him to win.

The Associated Press obtained the full audio of Trump's conversation with Georgia officials from a person on the call. The AP has a policy of not amplifying disinformation and unproven allegations. The AP will be posting the full audio as it annotates a transcript with fact check material. Raffensperger rebuffed Trump's request and Biden's victory in Georgia — and other states that propelled him to victory — is not in doubt.

There was no widespread fraud in the election, which a range of election officials across the country, as well as Trump's former attorney general, William Barr, have confirmed. Republican governors in Arizona and Georgia, key battleground states crucial to Biden's vic-

tory, have vouched for the integrity of the elections in their states. Nearly all the legal challenges from Trump and his allies have been dismissed by judges, including two tossed by the Supreme Court, where three Trump-nominated justices preside.

Yet following the president's lead, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz announced a coalition of 11 senators and senators-elect who will join an effort to attempt to subvert American voters during Electoral College certification, joining House Republicans who have already pledged similar.

Wednesday's congressional count is the final step in reaffirming Biden's win, after the Electoral College officially elected him 306-232 last month. That's the same margin Trump won by in 2016.

The constitutionally required meeting is normally a formality. Yet Cruz and the other Republicans, some of whom have their own White House ambitions, say they'll vote against certain state electors unless Congress appoints a commission to immediately audit the election results.

Republicans won't succeed in blocking the results. Challenges would have to be passed by the full Senate and Democrat-controlled House. But simply pledging to do so shows there are few boundaries for prominent Republicans aiming to demonstrate loyalty to Trump.

The last-ditch effort could impress Trump's base, a boost for Cruz and other Republicans thought to be preparing 2024 presidential runs. It's also provoking a heated battle within the GOP.

Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential

nominee in 2012 who has broken with his party before, called the tactic an "egregious ploy" that "may enhance the political ambition of some, but dangerously threatens our Democratic Republic." Pennsylvania Republican Sen. Pat Toomey, who is retiring, called out Cruz by name and said the Texan and other fellow Republican senators were undermining "a fundamental, defining feature" of American democracy. Sen. Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican, said he opposed the idea of Congress overturning the results of the Electoral College and thus exceeding its power and establishing "unwise precedents."

The moment is especially awkward for Vice President Mike Pence. In his role as president of the Senate, he presides over Wednesday's proceedings and will ultimately declare Biden's victory.

Previous vice presidents, including Richard Nixon and Al Gore, have played similar roles after tough presidential campaigns. But Pence, who may seek the White House in 2024, is seeking to avoid angering Trump and his base. He signaled support for the GOP's certification challenge over the weekend. GOP strategist Joe Brettell said that while challenging Electoral College certification will ultimately fail, it could serve to energize the Republican base in Georgia ahead of Tuesday's elections.

But "there has been, over and over, calculation by far right and tea party-elected folks that they can somehow control or bring the base within their grasp" only to see such efforts take on lives of their own, he said. □

CIA's new recruitment website aims to diversify spy agency

By DEB RIECHMANN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — WANTED: Spies from all backgrounds and walks of life.

Striving to further diversify its ranks, the CIA launched a new website Monday to find top-tier candidates who will bring a broader range of life experiences to the nation's premier intelligence agency.

The days of all American spies being white male graduates from Ivy League schools are long gone. The CIA director is a woman and women head all five of the agency's branches, including the directorates of science and technology, operations and digital innovation. But while the CIA has been diversifying for years, intelligence agencies still lag the federal workforce in minority representation. With thousands of job applicants annually, the CIA wants to do more to ensure its workforce reflects national demographics.

The revamped website has links for browsing CIA jobs complete with starting salaries and requirements, sections on working at the agency, and a streamlined application process.

"We've come a long way since I applied by simply mailing a letter marked 'CIA, Washington, D.C.,'" said CIA Director Gina Haspel, who joined the agency in 1985. She said in a statement that she hopes the new website piques the interest of talented Americans and gives them a sense of the "dynamic environment that awaits them here."

Haspel has made recruitment a priority since she became the first female director in May 2018. Since then, the CIA has started advertising on streaming services, launched an Instagram account and an online "onion site," a feature that makes both the information provider and the person accessing information more difficult to trace. Last year, the CIA designated its first executive for Hispanic engage-

ment, Ilka Rodriguez-Diaz, a veteran of more than three decades with the agency. She first joined after attending a CIA job fair in New Jersey. "The CIA had never been on my radar," she wrote in an op-ed in The Miami Herald after getting the job in October. "I didn't think I fit the 'profile.' After all, the spies I saw on TV were male Anglo-Saxon Ivy leaguers, not Latinas from New Jersey. Still, I went to my expert life coach, my mother, for advice. She said, 'No pierdes nada con ir.' (What have you got to lose in going?) So, I went to the job fair. The rest, as they say, is history."

Across the more than a dozen U.S. spy agencies, including the CIA, 61% of intelligence professionals in

fiscal 2019 were men compared with 39% women, according to an annual demographics report compiled by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. In fiscal 2019, the intelligence community saw an incremental increase in the number of minority professionals — 26.5%, up from 26.2%. But that's still lower than 37 percent in the federal workforce as a whole and 37.4 percent in the civilian labor force, the report said.

The largest minority or ethnic group at all the intelligence agencies, including the CIA, was Black or African American at 12% followed by Hispanic at 7% and Asian at 4%. Persons with disabilities represent 11.5% of the workforce



This May 21, 2018 file photo shows incoming Central Intelligence Agency director Gina Haspel at the agency's headquarters in Langley, Va.

Associated Press

at all the U.S. intelligence agencies — up a point from the year before.

"Even with all the challenges 2020 posed, it was a standout recruitment year for CIA. Our incoming class

is the third largest in a decade and represents the most diverse talent pool, including persons with disabilities, since 2010," said CIA spokesperson Nicole de Haay. □




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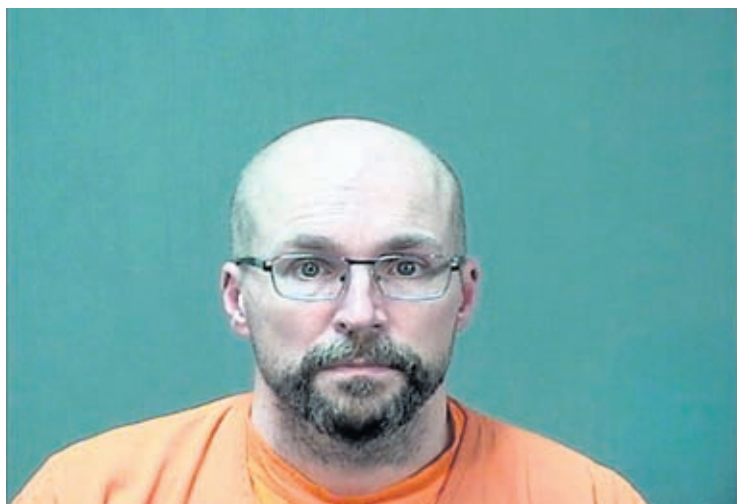
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Prosecutor: Wisconsin pharmacist thought vaccine was unsafe



In this booking photo provided by the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Office Monday, Jan. 4, 2021 in Port Washington, Wis. Steven Brandenburg is shown.

By **TODD RICHMOND**

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) —

A Wisconsin pharmacist convinced the world was "crashing down" told police he tried to ruin hundreds of doses of coronavirus vaccine because he believed the shots would mutate people's DNA, according to court documents released Monday.

Police in Grafton, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of Milwaukee, arrested Advocate Aurora Health pharmacist Steven Brandenburg last week following an investigation into the 57 spoiled vials of the

Associated Press

Moderna vaccine, which officials say contained enough doses to inoculate more than 500 people. Charges are pending.

"He'd formed this belief they were unsafe," Ozaukee County District Attorney Adam Gerol said during a virtual hearing. He added that Brandenburg was upset because he was in the midst of divorcing his wife, and an Aurora employee said Brandenburg had taken a gun to work twice.

A detective wrote in a probable cause statement that Brandenburg, 46, is an admitted conspiracy theo-

rist and that he told investigators he intentionally tried to ruin the vaccine because it could hurt people by changing their DNA.

Misinformation around the COVID-19 vaccines has surged online with false claims circulating on everything from the vaccines' ingredients to its possible side effects.

One of the earliest false claims suggested that the vaccines could alter DNA. The Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine as well as the Moderna vaccine rely on messenger RNA or mRNA, which is a fairly new technology used in vaccines that experts have been working on for years. mRNA vaccines help train the immune system to identify the spike protein on the surface of the coronavirus and create an immune response. Experts have said there is no truth to the claims that the vaccines can genetically modify humans.

Advocate Aurora Health Care Chief Medical Group Officer Jeff Bahr has said Brandenburg admitted that he deliberately removed the vials from refrigeration at the Grafton medical center overnight

on Dec. 24 into Dec. 25, returned them, then left them out again on the night of Dec. 25 into Saturday.

A pharmacy technician discovered the vials outside the refrigerator on Dec. 26. Bahr said Brandenburg initially said he had removed the vials to access other items in the refrigerator and had inadvertently failed to put them back. The Moderna vaccine is viable for 12 hours outside refrigeration, so workers used the vaccine to inoculate 57 people before discarding the rest. Police said the discarded doses were worth between \$8,000 and \$11,000.

Bahr said the doses people received Dec. 26 are all but useless. But Gerol said during the hearing that the vials were actually retained and Moderna would need to test the doses to make sure they're ineffective before he can file charges.

Brandenburg's attorney, Jason Baltz, did not speak on the merits of the case during the hearing. Gerol held off on filing any charges, saying he still needs to determine whether Brandenburg actually destroyed the doses.

Judge Paul Malloy ordered

Brandenburg held on a \$10,000 signature bond on the condition that he surrender his firearms, not work in health care and have no contact with Aurora employees.

Brandenburg is in the process of divorcing his wife of eight years. The couple has two small children.

According to an affidavit his wife filed on Dec. 30, the same day Brandenburg was arrested in the vaccine tampering, he stopped off at her house on Dec. 6 and dropped off a water purifier and two 30-day supplies of food, telling her that the world was "crashing down" and she was in denial. He said the government was planning cyberattacks and was going to shut down the power grid.

She added that he was storing food in bulk along with guns in rental units and she no longer felt safe around him. A court commissioner on Monday found that Brandenburg's children were in imminent danger and temporarily prohibited them from staying with him. Online court records indicate Brandenburg's divorce attorney withdrew from the case on Dec. 28. □

Biden inauguration to feature virtual, nationwide parade

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration will include a "virtual parade across America" consistent with crowd limits during the coronavirus era, organizers announced Sunday.

Following the swearing-in ceremony on Inauguration Day on Jan. 20 on the west front of the U.S. Capitol, Biden and his wife, first lady Jill Biden, will join Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and her husband in participating in a socially distanced Pass in Review on the Capitol's opposite front side. Those are military traditions where Biden will review the readiness of military troops.

Biden will also receive a traditional presidential escort with representatives from every branch of the military from 15th Street in Wash-



President-elect Joe Biden arrives at St. Edmond Catholic Church in Rehoboth Beach, Del., Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021.

Associated Press

ington to the White House. That, the Presidential Inaugural Committee says, will

be socially distanced too, while "providing the American people and world with

historic images of the President-elect proceeding to the White House without

attracting large crowds." Workers in recent days began dismantling an inaugural parade reviewing stand in front of the White House as Biden's transition team continues to prepare for festivities that will be mostly virtual. Accordingly, organizers also said they will hold a virtual parade nationwide to "celebrate America's heroes, highlight Americans from all walks of life in different states and regions, and reflect on the diversity, heritage, and resilience of the country as we begin a new American era." The parade event will be televised and feature "diverse, dynamic" performances in communities across the country, the inaugural committee promised. Participants will be announced in coming weeks. □

EU rejects criticism for slow vaccine rollout across bloc

By **SAMUEL PETREQUIN**

Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Commission defended its coronavirus vaccination strategy Monday amid growing criticism in member states about the slow rollout of COVID-19 shots across the region of 450 million inhabitants.

Vaccinations programs in the 27 nation-bloc have gotten off to a slow start and some EU members have been quick to blame the EU's executive arm for a perceived failure of delivering the right amount of doses. In Finland, health authorities are reportedly unhappy that the country only received about 40,000 doses in December, instead of the 300,000 that were expected.

Facing a barrage of questions on vaccines during a news conference, EU Commission spokesman Eric Mamer said the main problem with the deployment of vaccination programs "is an issue of production capacity, an issue that everybody is facing."

"We have actually signed contracts that would allow member states to get access to 2 billion doses, largely enough to vaccinate the whole of the EU population," he said.

As part of its strategy, the



A nurse prepares a vaccine prior to the vaccination of elderly people at a nursing house in Athens, Monday, Jan. 4, 2021.

EU has sealed six vaccines contracts, with Moderna, AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK, Janssen Pharmaceutica NV, Pfizer-BioNTech and CureVac. But only the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has been approved for use so far in the 27-nation bloc.

The European Medicines Agency's human medicines committee met Monday to discuss the Moderna vaccine, but didn't issue a recommendation for it to be given the green light for use in the EU. The agency tweeted that the meet-

ing "has not concluded today" and would continue Wednesday. It said it wouldn't comment further. Mamer also clarified the role of the commission in securing contracts with potential drug makers. He said the executive's arm "acted as an investor" to provide funding to pharmaceutical companies developing vaccines. The goal was to speed up production capacities and research, with all EU nations free to decide how many doses they would buy from

the vaccine producers of their choice. "Ultimately, these vaccines have to be produced, delivered, and some of the logistic chains involved are very sophisticated," Mamer said, insisting that vaccination programs have just started, and that the big deliveries of doses are foreseen around April. Asked why the Commission did not buy more doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, Stefan de Keersmaecker, the Commission's health policy spokesman, said the "main

philosophy was to diversify our portfolio, not to put all our eggs in one basket."

De Keersmaecker said the contract with Moderna provides for an initial purchase of 80 million doses on behalf of all EU nations but that the commission intends to use its option to request a further 80 million doses once the vaccine is approved. With the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the commission has an option for an extra 100 million doses that will bring the total to 300 million shots. Both vaccines require two shots to be fully effective. The Commission added without elaborating that it is in negotiation with Pfizer and BioNTech for the purchase of additional doses.

The slow rollout of vaccines has sparked widespread disappointment across the bloc. The cautious approach has seen just a few hundred people vaccinated in France after the first week, while the Dutch government faced criticism for its late start in delivering vaccinations, lagging well behind many other EU nations. Consequently, the Dutch health ministry said it is bringing forward the start of vaccinations by two days, with the first shots being administered Wednesday. □

Associated Press

Alberta leader reverses course, punishes for pandemic travel

By **ROB GILLIES**

Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Alberta's premier has reversed course and is now punishing members of his government for vacationing outside Canada despite government guidelines urging people to avoid nonessential travel during the pandemic.

Premier Jason Kenney said Monday he asked his chief of staff to resign and accepted the resignation of his Municipal Affairs minister. Several other members of his United Conservative party have also been demoted for travelling outside Canada.

Kenney said last week he would not punish members

of his government after he said he learned of travel abroad by a number of people in his government.

"Over the weekend I have listened to Albertans who are sending a clear message that they want real consequences," Kenney tweeted Monday.

Politicians travelling abroad for vacations during the pandemic became a big story in Canada last week after it became known that Ontario's finance minister went to the luxury Caribbean island of St. Barts for weeks and seemingly tried to hide the fact by sending social media posts showing him in a sweater before a fireplace.

Rod Phillips resigned last

Thursday after being ordered home by Ontario Conservative Premier Doug Ford.

Federal opposition Conservative Senate leader Don Plett also traveled to Mexico on Dec. 28 for personal reasons, a spokesperson for his office said in an email.

"Senator Plett travelled to Mexico on December 28th, upon arrival he reflected on his decision to travel and immediately made arrangements to return home on December 31st," the statement said.

Before he traveled, Plett posted a video message on twitter where he tells Canadians this Christmas will be different this year because "the pandemic has forced



This June 9, 2015 file photo shows then-Canadian Defence Minister Jason Kenney in Warsaw, Poland.

Associated Press

us to change some of those traditions, since we cannot travel and gather as we normally would."

A spokesperson for Cana-

da's Conservative leader said federal conservative party lawmakers were told not to travel before the holidays. □

Malaysia coroner: No foul play in death of French-Irish teen

By EILEEN NG

Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia

(AP) — A Malaysian coroner ruled Monday that the death of a French-Irish teenager whose body was found near a Malaysian jungle resort where she vanished while on vacation was most likely a misadventure that didn't involve other people.

Coroner Maimoonah Aid ruled out homicide, natural death and suicide and said Nora Anne Quoirin likely got lost after leaving her family's cottage on her own. The 15-year-old disappeared at the Dusun eco-resort in southern Negeri Sembilan state on Aug. 4, 2019, a day after the family arrived for a vacation. After a massive search, her body was found on Aug. 13 beside a stream on a palm oil estate about 2.5 kilometers (1.6 miles) from the resort. Police believed she climbed out of the cottage window on her own, with no evidence of any foul play. But her parents said she was likely kidnapped because she had mental and physical disabilities and wouldn't have wandered off on her own. They told the inquest that a third party could have dumped her body in the area following the search operation for her.

The coroner described the family's suggestions as "nothing more than prob-



In this image from video released by Malaysian Judiciary, Meabh Quoirin and Sebastian Quoirin, center frame, mother and father of missing schoolgirl Nora Anne Quoirin, attend the verdict for inquest into the death of the Irish-French teenager, Monday, Jan. 4, 2021.

Associated Press

ably theory" with no evidence.

Nora Anne was wearing only underwear when she went missing at nighttime, but her body was found naked. The coroner noted the family's contention that this lent credence to the possibility of sexual assault but said an extensive autopsy could find no such proof, nor evidence of struggle or smothering.

Maimoonah also said there were no suspicious circumstances prior to the teenager's disappearance, no ransom request and no signs of intrusion into the family's cottage.

"I ruled that there was no one involved in the death of Nora Anne. It is more probable than not that she

died by misadventure, i.e. that she had gone out of the (cottage) on her own and subsequently got lost in the abandoned palm oil plantation," the coroner said.

Nora Anne's parents, who were listening to the online verdict from their home in London, said in a statement that they were "utterly disappointed."

They said Nora was simply incapable of hiding in undergrowth or making her way out of the resort in the darkness unclothed. They said they had asked the coroner to return an open verdict, which would mean there was suspicion of foul play but inadequate proof to show so.

"We still believe this is the

only appropriate verdict because, throughout the testimonies presented in this case, layers of (professional) evidence have confirmed what we always believed — that Nora was abducted," they said.

The family cited unidentified fingerprints found on the outside of a window in their cottage that was found open the morning of her disappearance, failure of hundreds of trained rescuers to find her initially and police dogs unable to follow Nora's scent.

They feared possible DNA evidence was lost because of the lapsed time and the finding of her body in water, and noted a lack of major physical damage to her body if she truly walked

through the rough terrain. They also said the possibility of sexual assault remained, even though there was no evidence of violent assault, and that her highly submissive nature ruled out any struggle.

"Once again, we see that justice struggles to support the most vulnerable in society, only engaging with special needs at a surface level," they said.

A British pathologist who performed a second autopsy on Nora Anne's body in the United Kingdom testified that he agreed with the Malaysian findings that she died of intestinal bleeding due to starvation and stress. However, he said he couldn't fully rule out sexual assault due to severe body decomposition.

But the coroner said the teenager may not have been able to open the heavy sliding door to her parents' bedroom. She could have opened the window by accident, Maimoonah said.

Rescuers may also have initially overlooked Nora's body due to the thick jungle terrain, Maimoonah added. The autopsy estimated that she died between two and four days before her body was discovered.

A total of 49 witnesses testified over 24 days since last August via video conferencing due to the coronavirus pandemic. □



A farmer lies under the belly of a tractor trolley next to a bonfire as they block a major highway in a protest against new farm laws while it rains at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh state border, India, Monday, Jan. 4, 2021.

Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Representatives of the Indian government and protest-

ing farmers failed again Monday to reach agreement on the farmers' de-

Protesting farmers, Indian gov't fail to resolve deadlock

mand that new agricultural reform laws be repealed. With the government refusing to revoke the legislation, the farmers pledged to continue blockading key highways linking the capital with the country's north. The two sides agreed to meet for more talks on Friday.

"It is up to the government whether it wants to solve the farmers' problems. We will not end our protests until our demands are met," said Hannan Mollah, a leader of the farmers.

Tens of thousands of farmers have been blocking the highways for nearly 40 days despite the coronavirus pandemic, rains and an ongoing cold wave.

Farmers fear the government will stop buying grain at minimum guaranteed prices under the laws and that corporations will then push prices down. The government said it is willing to pledge that guaranteed prices will continue.

The farmers say the laws will lead to the cartelization and commercialization of

agriculture and make farmers vulnerable to corporate greed.

The farmers have threatened to hold a rally on Jan. 26 when India celebrates Republic Day if their demands are not met.

In their last meeting on Dec. 30, the two sides reached a consensus on two issues — that the government would continue its subsidy of electricity for irrigating farms and that farmers would not be punished for burning crop residues, a cause of air pollution. □

Saudi Arabia to lift Qatar embargo, easing the Gulf crisis



In this May 5, 2018 photo, a giant image of the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, adorns a tower in Doha, Qatar.

Associated Press

By AYA BATRAWY and
ISABEL DEBRE
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia will open its airspace and land border to Qatar on Monday evening in the first step toward ending a years-long diplomatic crisis that deeply divided U.S. defense partners, frayed societal ties and tore apart a traditionally clubby alliance of Gulf states. Qatar's only land border has been mostly closed since mid-2017, when Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain launched a blockade against the tiny Gulf state, accusing it of supporting Islamist extremist groups and of having warm ties with Iran. The Saudi border, which Qatar relied on for the import of dairy products, construction materials and other goods, opened briefly during the past three years to allow Qataris into Saudi Arabia to perform the Islamic hajj pilgrimage. It was unclear what concessions Qatar had made or is promising to make regarding a shift in its policies. Kuwait, which had been mediating throughout the dispute, was first to announce the diplomatic breakthrough through its foreign minister. Earlier on Monday, the foreign minister had reportedly traveled to Doha to deliver a message to Qatar's ruling emir,

Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

While the Saudi decision marks a major milestone toward resolving the Gulf spat, the path toward full reconciliation is far from guaranteed. The rift between Abu Dhabi and Doha has been deepest, with the UAE and Qatar at sharp ideological odds. Following Kuwait's announcement, the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, tweeted that his country was keen to restore Gulf unity. However, he cautioned: "We have more work to do and we are in the right direction."

The lifting of the embargo by Saudi Arabia paves the way for Qatar's ruler to attend an annual summit of Gulf leaders Tuesday that will be held in the kingdom's ancient desert site of Al-Ula. The summit would traditionally be chaired by Saudi King Salman, though his son and heir, the crown prince, may instead lead the meeting.

State-run Qatari media confirmed Monday evening Sheikh Tamim would be attending the summit, a move that analysts say would have been domestically sensitive for him had the Saudi blockade still been in place. This year, Egypt's president has also been invited to attend the summit of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation

Council, which comprises Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.

Kuwait's foreign minister said in a statement carried on state TV that Kuwait's ruler had spoken with Qatar's emir and Saudi Arabia's crown prince. The conversations "emphasized that everyone was keen on reunification," and would gather in Al-Ula to sign a statement that promises to "usher in a bright page of brotherly relations."

The summit will be "inclusive," leading the states toward "reunification and solidarity in facing the challenges of our region," Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was quoted as saying in remarks carried by the Saudi state-run news agency.

The decision to end the Saudi embargo comes just weeks after President Donald Trump's advisor and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, visited the kingdom and Qatar in a final push by the administration to secure a diplomatic breakthrough.

It also comes just ahead of President-elect Joe Biden's swearing in. Saudi Arabia may be seeking to both grant the Trump administration a final diplomatic win and remove stumbling blocs to building warm ties with the Biden administration, which is expected to take a firmer stance toward the kingdom.

Normalization with Qatar could buy Saudi Arabia time to strike compromises with the Biden administration on other issues, like its war in Yemen and potential U.S. re-engagement with Iran, said Samuel Ramani, a non-resident fellow at the Gulf International Forum.

"Saudi Arabia could frame a partial détente, which allows Qatari civilian planes to fly over Saudi airspace and de-escalates the information war, as proof of 'new thinking' in Riyadh," Ramani said ahead of the announcement.

In a recent column for the UAE's The National newspaper, Beirut Institute founder Raghida Dergham questioned whether Gulf states would be able to finalize a strategy on how to approach the Iran issue, which they would then put forward to the Biden administration as it comes to power on Jan. 20.

At heart are concerns that Qatar's close relations with Turkey and Iran have undermined regional security. Egypt and the UAE view Qatar and Turkey's support

of the Muslim Brotherhood as a security threat and have deemed the group a terrorist organization. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are primarily concerned with Qatar's close ties with regional foe Iran.

Those simmering tensions came to a boil in the summer of 2017, when the four countries announced their stunning blockade on Qatar and cut all transport and diplomatic links with it. The move frayed social ties, separating families who'd intermarried with Qataris. It also pushed Qatar diplomatically closer to Turkey and Iran, which both rushed to Doha's aid with food and medical supplies that had been in short supply in the first days of the embargo. Patriotic fervor swept through Qatar in support of Sheikh Tamim's resolve.

Gas-rich Qatar also took an economic hit from the blockade, and its national airline was forced to take longer and more costly routes. It was unclear how the blockade would impact its ability to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. □

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LOCAL



2021: what is expected? Aruba Food & Beverage Association urges for clarity and involvement



ORANJESTAD — “We are informed afterwards by our government about decisions that influence our businesses directly, for example the curfew and its related hours of closing,” says the president of Aruba Food & Beverage Association (AFBA), Jan van Nes. The Food & Beverage sector has suffered and is still suffering due to the Covid-19 crisis and the future is insecure. “But it could be better when we are involved with governmental decisions from the beginning and work on solutions in a transparent way together with all stake holders involved. Unfortunately that is not the case leaving our sector and its thousands of employees in great insecurity about the near future.”

Aruba went into lockdown from March 2020 to July 2020. Travel and tourism's overall economic contribution represents more than 88% of the island's total GDP and the sector supports over nine out of ten jobs. In other words, less than 10% of the jobs in Aruba are not supported by the sector in one way or another. With the financial support of the Netherlands, companies could register for wage subsidy from March 2020 up to today, but to guarantee this settlement there are conditions set by the Netherlands with regards to reforms.

Daniele Ferrara is a board member of AFBA and also Managing Director at Gianni's Group. “Most businesses will not survive without the wage subsidy provided by the Netherlands. But we do not know until when this is secured and up to what percentage? This is a priority issue for us.” The Government of Aruba (GOA) is not transparent and does not provide clarity on life-changing decisions for Aruba's business owners. “Besides the wage subsidy, we are asking for answers with regards to labor law flexibility and information about the status of the vaccination.”

Recently Van Nes and Ferrara gave a presenta-

tion to the Governor on his request where they showed a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. They discussed how the sector can get out of this situation. Van Nes stated, “Also we presented how we have gone through the pandemic as of March. One question we asked the Governor which he could not answer was ‘What happens if Aruba does not comply with the Dutch conditions that apply to the receipt of wage subsidy?’ This is an extremely important issue as it goes hand-in-hand with the investments of companies on the island, their equipment, human resources and finances.”

SWOT outcome

Strengths

- Aruba was well positioned before COVID-19 and featured high occupancies all year long
- High repeaters base
- Strong time share base
- Diversity of restaurants on the island
- Good to very good medical facilities on the island
- Some of our nature areas got a break
- Aruba took measures that favored tourism to the island
- Fast launching of Fase (Emergency Social Assistance Fund)
- Fast and efficient launching of Wage Subsidy

Weaknesses

- Perhaps too many restaurants on the island
- Bureaucracy at every corner in renewing permits and establishing businesses
- Local young population not as interested in jobs F&B sector
- Strong need for outside expertise
- High cost of business
- High taxes
- Inflexibility in giving precariat for additional

- space
- Time to adapt Wage subsidy & Fase so more staff will be hired

Opportunities

- The Netherlands reform
- Sailing the Sails execution
- Eliminating red tape
- Re-engineer ourselves by means of diversification
- Vaccination
- Flexibilisation of labor laws

Threads

- Third wave
- Lockdown
- Indiscipline of the public of abiding by the rules
- More red tape
- Staff on permits without AZV
- Unfair competition by F&B outlets mushrooming
- Incompliance GOA Landspakket (conditions set by the Netherlands)

Continued on Page 9

MONDAY MADNESS AND BINGO ARE TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED

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2021: what is expected?

Aruba Food & Beverage Association urges for clarity and involvement

Continued from Page 8

Permits, problems and no communication

"We have employees waiting for more than six months on an answer with regards to their permit extension. They have already four or five years of permits, living and working on Aruba and are now in this grey area where they do not know their status. For us employers we have people that are in the meantime uninsured. What happens if they get into an accident at work? Is this my responsibility?" asks van Nes. "This situation is out of control. The past nine months we have had not one single meeting with the Labor Minister and stakeholders, we feel that these issues are shuffled under the carpet. But these people on permits are here and they will not disappear by ignoring them. Also we will need them if the island continues picking up. But what if not? We need to structure this and implement premiums to them who go by free will and also to those who are ready to



come back when they are needed again. At this moment we see no other option than to prefer high season contracts." All of this has

been brought forward to the government and requests for a Tripartite have not been met yet. Ferrara injects, "there is a tiredness right now, because of the not knowing and the past year. We do not wish to wait and see but anticipate, if only we are allowed to." Within his company, he is a true believer of direct communication and transparency with his staff. "This is what we do at Giannis and it results in a strong feeling of solidarity among the colleagues." Van Nes adds, "Do not forget that people have issues at home due to this crisis. Depressions, domestic violence and stress are displaying themselves and influence work as well. They do not know what the new month will bring them." It is evident to them that at least clarity, transparency and providence of data needs to be given by the government. "Luckily the Christmas period has given us some good business but we cannot rely on two weeks in a year. It is impossible to make plans without some solid ground under your feet." □



Article by Etnia Nativa

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The cult of the death

Episode LXXXVI -86

ORANJESTAD — Throughout history man provoked and forged his form of existence within his natural environment. He learned of his ecosystem and how to adapt and dominate towards civilization. Caring for his dead was also a very important part of life and that was no different in Aruba.

When we look at how each group or tribe cared for their deceased, we find that our Aruba ancestors also performed their special ceremonies of devotion and respect. Caring for her deceased relatives was an honor. From archaeological finds, much of their social and political organizations can be determined and, by studying the remains of their tombs, a differentiation in their status and hierarchy can be established for each individual by their remains, for example. The inhabitants of the large villages practiced four or five different forms of burial. These differences undoubtedly represent social differences in these Dabajuroid communities. The background of the recorded differences remains a mystery until now, but the differences, by any doubt, are evidence of the status of individuals, families or groups within the community.

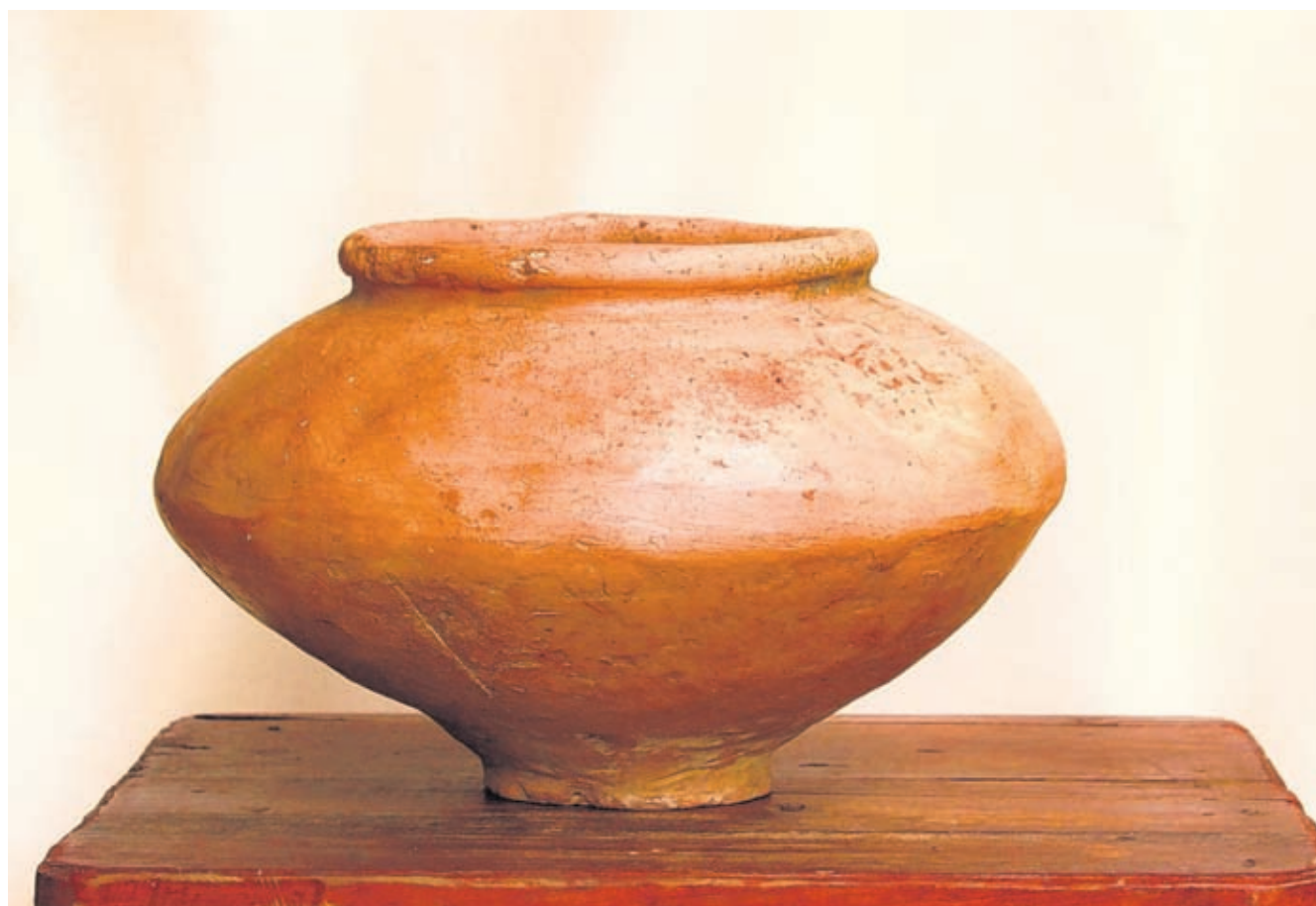
The dead were buried in the ground within the village and some with special gifts in their grave. However, some were found without any gifts. This means they were buried without any gifts, or the gifts were perishable and disappeared without a trace for us. The gifts that we find in some of the dead were buried in large clay pots or urns: direct burial-urn. In fact, the dead are buried twice. The corpse is first buried in the ground, after a few months or even years, the bones are excavated. These bones or skeletal remains subsequently obtain their permanent resting place in a fairly small vessel. If, after such a procedure, the bones are buried in a large container, the archaeologist may misinterpret it as direct urn



burial.

We have a fairly clear idea of the whole process of burial in secondary urns from existing descriptions of such "double" burials. They are practiced to this day by

the indigenous Guajiro, residents of the peninsula of the same name on the border with Venezuela and Colombia. More comparisons can be made between the Guajiro and the pre-Columbian population of Aruba, such as their environment, food and religion, which had everything to do with how the natives, particularly from this area, related to the world of the dead and beyond. How to prepare each of your deceased relatives for their spiritual journey through the underworld and into the land of their dead ancestors and friends. There is evidence that Dabajuroid people, in addition to these types of burials within the village, have done burials in caves outside the village.□



To get to know a little more regarding Aruba's and its cultural origins we highly recommend you to book your participation in our cultural encounter session.

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Start 2021 off strong with these money moves

By LIZ WESTON of NerdWallet

After the train wreck that was 2020, you may well question whether it's worth trying to plan anything. But knocking off a few financial tasks early in the year can better prepare you for whatever 2021 has in store.

FILE YOUR TAX RETURN ASAP

Filing your tax return early typically means getting your refund sooner. Not only that, it could thwart refund-stealing identity thieves. Also, if you were owed a stimulus check in 2020 but didn't get one, or should have gotten more, you can claim the missing money on your return.

If you owe the IRS, it's better to know sooner rather than later. You'll have more time to find the money or arrange a payment plan. Also, unemployment checks are generally taxable. Many people who received last year's extended jobless benefits may face a larger-than-expected tax bill this year, tax experts say.

CHECK YOUR WITHHOLDING

Once your 2020 tax return is prepared, you can use that and your first pay stub from 2021 to see if you're on track with tax withholding.



This undated file photo provided by NerdWallet shows Liz Weston, a columnist for personal finance website NerdWallet.com.

Associated Press

A good tax withholding calculator can help you determine how to adjust the amounts taken from each paycheck. Then, contact your employer if you need to make changes.

If you're self-employed, you may need to make estimated quarterly payments. You could consult a tax professional to find out how much those should be.

ADJUST YOUR RETIREMENT SAVINGS

Consider increasing and diversifying your retirement contributions. After you take full advantage of any

available company match in a 401(k) or 403(b), look into funding a Roth IRA. Financial planners often recommend having at least some money in a Roth so you can better control your tax bill in retirement. If your income is too high to make a direct Roth contribution — the ability to contribute starts to phase out at modified adjusted gross income of \$140,000 for singles and \$208,000 for married filing jointly — you could consider converting a portion of an existing traditional IRA.

CHECK YOUR SPENDING

Budgeting apps and personal finance websites can help you see where your money went in 2020 and help you make a plan for 2021. You can also look back over bank or credit card statements. But even if you can't get the full year's worth of transactions, reviewing just a few months can show you some patterns and help you identify spending you want to change.

SET UP YOUR SAVINGS 'BUCKETS'

Preparing for irregular but predictable expenses can help you feel less panicked when those bills arrive. These expenses can in-

clude insurance premiums, property taxes, car and home repairs, vacations, back-to-school shopping and holidays. Check your spending in each of these areas for the past few years to ballpark how much to save this year. Once you have your savings goals for each category, consider setting up separate savings accounts at an online bank that doesn't charge monthly fees. You can divide the amounts by the number of paychecks you'll get before the money is needed, and set up automatic transfers from your checking account to the appropriate savings account after each payday.

PUT CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS ON AUTOMATIC

Most charities prefer getting regular contributions throughout the year, since the steady income helps them plan. You may discover you can give more if you're not trying to squeeze your contributions in with other year-end spending. You can use your bank's bill pay system to send monthly checks or arrange with the charity to charge a credit card.

SPEND YOUR MEDICAL FSA

Flexible spending accounts are employer-provided benefits that allow you to put aside tax-free money for medical or child care expenses. If you signed up for your employer's medical FSA, try to spend that money as early in the year as possible. You don't have to wait until the money is taken from your paycheck to use it for eligible health care expenses. (That's different from child care FSAs, which don't allow you to spend money before you contribute it.) Spending early has a few advantages. You don't risk leaving money in the account and potentially losing it. (Many employers extend the deadline for using the money past Dec. 31, but at some point unspent money is forfeited.) Incurring medical expenses early in the year can help you meet insurance deductibles, too, so the rest of your health care can cost less. Also, if you leave your job during the year, you don't have to finish making FSA contributions. In other words, you can spend the full amount you had planned to contribute, up to \$2,750, without actually having to contribute the full amount. □

Bid to address health costs by 3 corporate giants is over

By TOM MURPHY
AP Health Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — A health care venture conceived by Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway, and JPMorgan to attack soaring costs is dissolving.

Haven, which was formed in 2018 by the three U.S. corporate giants, will end operations by the end of February, a company spokeswoman said Monday. She gave no reason for the end of the venture.

The independent company was created to focus on improving the care delivered to employees of those businesses while doing a better job of managing the expense. The companies then picked a high-profile CEO, Harvard professor and surgeon Dr. Atul Gawande, to lead the



This combination of file photos from left shows Warren Buffett, chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, on Sept. 19, 2017, in New York, Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon.com, on Sept. 24, 2013, in Seattle and JP Morgan Chase Chairman and CEO Jamie Dimon on July 12, 2013, in New York.

Associated Press

venture.

In 2019, the company picked a name for itself, but it had been largely silent since then.

Gawande departed last

May. Haven's remaining employees will be absorbed by the three companies involved in its creation.

A Haven spokeswoman

said the company started a new design for health care benefits that eliminated patient out-of-pocket payments like deductibles and co insurance and en-

couraged access to primary care.

She said the company also identified areas for cutting drug costs.

Health care costs have vastly outpaced wages and inflation, stressing families and employers for years. Benefits experts had expected any solutions developed by Haven to become widely adopted beyond the three companies that created the venture. □

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Google workers form new labor union, a tech industry rarity

By **MATT O'BRIEN**
AP Technology Writer

A group of Google engineers and other workers announced Monday they have formed a union, creating a rare foothold for the labor movement in the tech industry.

About 225 employees at Google and its parent company Alphabet are the first dues-paying members of the Alphabet Workers Union. They represent a fraction of Alphabet's workforce, far short of the threshold needed to get formal recognition as a collective bargaining group in the U.S.

But the new union, which will be affiliated with the larger Communication Workers of America, says it will serve as a "structure that ensures Google workers can actively push for real changes at the company." Its members say they want more of a voice not just on wages, benefits and protections against discrimination and harassment but also broader ethical questions about how Google pursues its business ventures.

The unionization campaign is the latest signal from employees who don't believe the company is living up to its professed ideals, as expressed in its original "Don't be evil" slogan.



In this Sept. 24, 2019, file photo a woman walks below a Google sign on the company's campus in Mountain View, Calif.

Associated Press

Google said Monday that it's tried to create a supportive and rewarding workplace but suggested it won't be negotiating directly with the union.

"Of course our employees have protected labor rights that we support," said a statement from Kara Silverstein, the company's director of people operations. "But as we've always done, we'll continue engaging directly with all our employees."

Unionization campaigns haven't historically been able to gain much traction among elite tech workers, who get hefty salaries and other perks like free food and shuttle rides to work. But workplace activism at Google and other big tech firms has grown in recent years as employees call for better handling of sexual harassment and discrimination and avoiding harmful uses of the products they're helping to build and sell.

Many employees began seeing the power of their workplace activism in 2018 when an internal outcry led Google to abandon its work supplying the Pentagon with artificial intelligence services for conflict zones. Later in 2018, thousands of Google employees walked out to protest how the company handled sexual misconduct allegations against executives.

Google software engineer Chewy Shaw, who has been elected to the new union's executive council, said he and others decided to form the group after seeing colleagues pushed out of their roles for their activism. "We want to have a counterforce to protect workers who are speaking up," Shaw said.

The latest examples came last month, when prominent AI ethics researcher Timnit Gebru says she was fired over a research paper that Google wanted to disassociate from; and as a federal labor agency

filed a complaint accusing the company of spying on employees and then firing some of them during a 2019 effort to organize a union. Google has denied the allegations in the case, which is scheduled for an April hearing.

The union's first members include engineers, as well as sales associates, administrative assistants and the workers who test self-driving vehicles at Alphabet automotive division Waymo. Many work at Google's Silicon Valley headquarters, while others are at offices in Massachusetts, New York and Colorado.

"One of the reasons why it's taken a while for workers to get to this point is because the leaders of these companies did a good job of convincing workers they were these benevolent folks who were going to provide for them, kind of a paternalistic model," said Beth Allen, communications director at the CWA. □

Slack kicks off 2021 with a global outage



This Dec. 2, 2020, file photo shows the Slack app icon being displayed on a computer screen in Tokyo.

Associated Press

By **MICHELLE CHAPMAN**
AP Business Writer

Slack, the messaging service used by millions of people for work and school, suffered a global

outage on Monday, the first day back for most people returning from the New Year's holiday.

It's the latest tech glitch to show how disruptive technical difficulties can be when millions of people are depending on just a few services to work and go to school from home during the pandemic.

The company stopped releasing its daily user count after topping 12 million last year.

"Our team is currently investigating and we're sorry for any troubles this may be causing," Slack said in a prepared statement.

The outage began around 10 a.m. Eastern time and disrupted service in the U.S., Germany, India, the U.K., Japan and elsewhere. At 12:30 p.m., service was still sporadic and Slack said the outage was ongoing, but that some users may begin to see improvement. Slack said that people should check <https://status.slack.com> for updates.

Internet service outages are not uncommon, are usually resolved relatively swiftly and are only rarely the result of hacking or other intentional mischief. Google went down briefly in December, with people in several countries briefly unable to access their Gmail accounts, watch YouTube videos or get to their online documents during an outage Monday. In August, Zoom went down briefly just as many students were beginning the school year at home. And in September, Microsoft services had an outage that lasted for five hours.

More complaints rolled in as the sun hit the West coast and there were still outages four hours after it began in New York City. The outage comes about a month after Salesforce.com said it would acquire Slack for \$27.7 billion. The companies hope to be better able to compete against Microsoft, which is a threat to both of them. □

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Ted Danson and Holly Hunter combine for comedy 'Mr. Mayor'

By **MARK KENNEDY**

AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — There's a government office right there in the very title of Ted Danson's new series, but the new NBC comedy "Mr. Mayor" is anything but political.

"If you consider politics the headlines in the papers and the breaking news on CNN, that ain't us," said Danson, who stars as Los Angeles mayor Neil Bremer.

"We point out the foibles and silliness, and wonderfully lovable, pathetic, lame side of humanity but we don't stop and preach. We never are preaching."

The show is from Emmy Award-winners Robert Carlock and Tina Fey, the brains behind "30 Rock" and "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt."

The 30-minute comedy takes over the 8 p.m. anchor slot in NBC's Thursday comedy block starting Thursday. Danson considers the show more an office or family comedy.

Danson plays a businessman who made a fortune on billboards and then retired. He ran for mayor just to impress his daughter, a sophomore in high school played by Kyla Kenedy from "The Walking Dead."

The new mayor is not a very polished political figure, prone to mangling Spanish



This image released by NBC shows Ted Danson as Mayor Neil Bremer, left, and Bobby Moynihan as Jayden Kwapis in a scene from the new comedy "Mr. Mayor," premiering on Thursday.

Associated Press

and saying things like "I'm very open to a robot police force." He's got a dubious staff behind him — the trio of comedians Bobby Moynihan, Vella Lovell and Mike Cabellon — and a chief rival in Holly Hunter, who plays an ultra-liberal councilmember. "Like underwear bought in a drug store, you're not going to last two months," she warns the mayor.

In the first episode, the mayor, hoping for a winning issue, steals the idea of a plastic drinking straw ban from his daughter and it blows up in his face. Hunter's character offers to help

— but only if he will rename coyotes as "mini-wolves." There is satire, but nothing that might pit red states against blue ones.

"Immediately, I think the audience is alerted to the fact that we're not going to be dissecting the Trump administration," said Hunter. "This is not some new angle on a political conversation."

Danson — a veteran TV star of such shows as "Cheers," "Becker" and "The Good Place" — hadn't worked with Hunter, the Oscar-winner for "The Piano" and

star of the TNT drama series "Saving Grace." The two instantly clicked, a pair of show biz pros.

"There are some benefits to having been around for a while, which is there is a relaxation and a recognition of, 'Oh, I'm in good hands. This other person's got me,'" Danson said.

The cast and crew have endured a lot during the pandemic. They shot three episodes until production had to shut down for nine months. The cast kept in contact during the hiatus, even going over scripts virtually. "We had jam ses-

sions Zooming together and I think in a way that created a certain feeling of tightness," Hunter said. "We would just read a new script just to hear it between us. You know, it formed a different kind of bond."

When they all reunited, a TV set designed for a fast-paced, whacky comedy now had real-world boundaries — face masks and shields, social distancing, daily COVID-19 tests and van rides that held only one actor. "The first day or two, it's weird. And then all of a sudden you get used to the new normal," he added. "After years of doing this, when they say 'Action!' and you've taken the masks all off, it comes back."

But Danson is quick to put it in perspective. "It's tricky as actors to talk about sacrifices," he said. "We came back after nine months of the pandemic where the whole world saw who the heroes were, who the celebrities really were, who the people were that really, truly put their lives on the line."

The time off might actually have helped the show, giving the cast time to digest the rat-a-tat scripts, which are stocked with Carlock and Fey's astute cultural observations and sometimes absurdist flights of fancy. □

Italy's Uffizi opens Dante anniversary with virtual exhibit



This image made available on Thursday, Dec. 31, 2020, shows Lucifer, one of the original 88 drawings that went with Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy by artist Federico Zuccari.

Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — Florence's Uffizi Gallery is making avail-

able for viewing online 88 rarely displayed drawings

of Dante's "Divine Comedy" to mark the 700th anniversary in 2021 of the Italian poet's death.

The virtual show of high-resolution images of works by the 16th-Century Renaissance artist Federico Zuccari will be accessible from Friday "for free, any hour of the day, for everyone," said Uffizi director Eike Schmidt. The drawings illustrate Dante's masterpiece, "The Divine Comedy," an epic poem in three parts recounting a pilgrim's travels through hell, purgatory and heaven.

Dante Alighieri is revered as the father of the Italian language.

A Tuscan by birth, he died

and was buried in the city of Ravenna, a three-time ancient capital located in the region of Emilia-Romagna.

The pencil-and-ink drawings are in contrasting shades of black and red. They were completed during Zuccari's stay in Spain from 1586 to 1588, and became part of the Uffizi collection in 1738.

The drawings have only been publicly displayed twice previously, and then only a selection, owing to their fragility: in Florence in 1865 to mark the 600th anniversary of Dante's birth and coinciding with Italy's unification as a nation, and for a specialized exhibit

about Dante in Abruzzo in 1993.

The drawings were originally bound in a volume, with each illustration opposite the corresponding verse in Dante's epic poem.

The texts and scholarly comment will also be included in the virtual show, titled "A riveder le stelle," (to see the stars again), a reference to the celebrated last line of Dante's "Inferno." Schmidt said the drawings are a "great resource" for Dante scholars and students, as well as "anyone who likes to be inspired by Dante's pursuit of knowledge and virtue." □

Curry scores career-high 62 points, Warriors beat Blazers

By The Associated Press
SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Stephen Curry let it fly from way out under pressure with a minute-plus left for another perfect swish on the way to a career-high 62 points, and the Golden State Warriors beat Portland 137-122 on Sunday night to split the two-game set with the Trail Blazers.

Curry had the highest-scoring game in the NBA this season, finishing 18 for 31 and 8 of 16 on 3-pointers after beginning with a 21-point first quarter. He had his 10th career 30-point half to help the Warriors take a 66-54 at the break. One small blemish in his brilliant night: Curry had his streak of free throws snapped at a franchise-record 80 in the first. The run dated to March 29, 2019, vs. Memphis. Against Portland, he made a career-high 18 on 19 attempts. Damian Lillard scored 32 points for Portland, and CJ McCollum added 28. McCollum shot 2 for 8 from deep after his 25 3-pointers over the initial five games left him and Curry as the only players to ever do so. After Portland's 25-point win Friday night, the Warriors were embarrassed and determined to be more aggressive and defend better after the Blazers came out firing to finish 20 of 43 from deep — and they looked more energetic on the defensive end. Portland shot 14 of 43 on 3s Sunday.

LAKERS 108, GRIZZLIES 94
MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — LeBron James had 22 points, 13 rebounds and eight assists, Anthony Davis added 17 points and nine rebounds and Los Angeles opened a two-game set in Memphis with a victory.

James played within the offense for the first three quarters, then became more aggressive to start the fourth, scoring the Lakers first 10 points of the period. His 3-pointer with 2:34 left made it 101-90.

Montrezl Harrell added 16 points and nine rebounds to help the Lakers win their third straight.

Kyle Anderson led Memphis with 18 points, and Jonas



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (30) drives to the basket against Portland Trail Blazers center Jusuf Nurkic (27) and guard Gary Trent Jr. (2) during the first half of an NBA basketball game in San Francisco, Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021.

Associated Press

Valanciunas had 14 points and 10 rebounds. Tyus Jones also had 14 points, and rookie Desmond Bane had 13.

The Lakers led 56-54 at the break after both teams held advantages of at least nine points in the first half. Los Angeles took a 77-75 lead into the fourth.

The teams will meet again Tuesday night.

CLIPPERS 112, SUNS 107

PHOENIX (AP) — Paul George scored 39 points and Los Angeles held on to beat Phoenix after nearly blowing a 31-point lead in a matchup of two of the Western Conference's top early season teams.

At 5-2, the Clippers are tied with the Suns and Los Angeles Lakers for the West

lead.

George was 7 of 10 from 3-point range and Los Angeles was 17 of 29 overall. Kawhi Leonard added 15 points, but shot 4 of 21 from the field, and Luke Kennard came off the bench to add 14 points.

Devin Booker led Phoenix with 25 points, and Deandre Ayton added 24. Chris Paul, who played six seasons for the Clippers, had 15 points, nine rebounds and six assists. They had won four in a row and 13 of 14 dating to their perfect run in the NBA bubble.

CELTICS 122, PISTONS 120

DETROIT (AP) — Jayson Tatum hit a fallaway as Blake Griffin stumbled with 2.9 seconds left, then tied up the Detroit veteran on the

other end to help Boston beat the Pistons for a week-end split.

Jaylen Brown led Boston with 31 points. He hit a late 3-pointer and was 13 of 16 from the field, two nights after his late miss sealed a loss in the opener in Detroit. Tatum had 24 points and 12 assists.

Jerami Grant scored 22 points for the Pistons, his career-best fifth straight game with at least 20.

On Friday night, Detroit beat Boston 96-93 for its only victory of the season.

WIZARDS 123, NETS 122

NEW YORK (AP) — Bradley Beal had 27 points, 10 rebounds and the assist on Thomas Bryant's go-ahead dunk with 14.9 seconds left, leading Washington past

Brooklyn. Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant missed jumpers on the last possession, dropping the Nets to 3-4.

Russell Westbrook had 24 points and 10 assists but only five rebounds after recording triple-doubles in his first four games with the Wizards. Bryant finished with 21 points and 14 rebounds to help Washington win its second straight after an 0-5 start. Irving had 30 points and 10 assists, and Durant had 28 points, 11 rebounds and seven assists.

NUGGETS 124, TIMBERWOLVES 109

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Jamal Murray scored a season-high 36 points, Nikola Jokic had 19 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists for his fourth triple-double of the season and Denver beat Minnesota.

Murray scored 26 points in the first half, including 16 in the second quarter.

Malik Beasley, the former Denver draft pick traded to the Timberwolves last season, scored a season-high 25 for Minnesota.

The teams will complete home-and-home set Tuesday night in Denver.

JAZZ 130, SPURS 109

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Bojan Bogdanovic scored 28 points and Utah made a season-high 21 3-pointers to beat San Antonio.

Donovan Mitchell added 22 points and nine assists in 29 minutes. Utah was 21 for 41 on 3-pointers compared to 6 for 19 by San Antonio.

Keldon Johnson had 22 points for the Spurs. San Antonio suffered its fourth straight loss as well as its largest margin of defeat.

BULLS 118, MAVERICKS 108

CHICAGO (AP) — Zach LaVine had 39 points and Coby White scored 21 of his 23 points in the second half to lead Chicago past Dallas.

Jalen Brunson, starting in place of the injured Luka Doncic, had 31 points for the Mavericks. Doncic sat out because of a left quadriceps contusion. He was injured Friday night in the second quarter of a home victory over Miami.

Otto Porter Jr. added 15 for the Bulls. □

NFL playoff field: powerhouses, pretenders and a 7-9 team

By **BARRY WILNER**
AP Pro Football Writer

From the rested in Kansas City and Pittsburgh to the relieved in Cleveland, Chicago and Los Angeles, the field for the Super Bowl chase is set. There are some powerhouses and some pretenders — and a team with a losing record.

The reigning Super Bowl champion Chiefs (14-2) and Green Bay (13-3) earned each conference's lone bye in the expanded playoffs. And no, adding a third wild-card entrant is not why a 7-9 club will be playing next weekend. Washington "earned" that spot by winning the abysmal NFC East that displayed in the finale of the regular season why NFC Least has been so appropriate a moniker.

So while New York Giants fans scream that Eagles coach Doug Pederson didn't truly play to beat Washington on Sunday night, it should emphasized that the Giants went 6-10, a record more in line with relegation than reward.

Besides, coach Ron Rivera dealing with skin cancer and quarterback Alex Smith returning from an injury that nearly cost him his leg, those are redemptive and rewarding plots.

"This one's special just because of how hard it was," Rivera said. "How tough everything was, how it's been on the guys, the organization. There's a great group of young men in there and we're trying to do things the right way. It's really a cool thing to come out and get the division."

As for the spoils, here's who plays next weekend and



Washington Football Team's Alex Smith plays during the first half of an NFL football game against the Philadelphia Eagles, Sunday, Jan. 3, 2021, in Philadelphia.

Associated Press

how it might look.

SATURDAY

Indianapolis (11-5) at Buffalo (13-3)

Frank Reich has been a hero in Western New York since engineering the great comeback in NFL history while replacing the injured Jim Kelly in a 1992 opening-round matchup with the Houston Oilers. Reich now coaches the Colts, and he'll remain heroic in Buffalo if they go quietly against what has been the league's most impressive team the last month.

This might be Colts QB Philip Rivers' final game, but it's the Indy defense that must stand tall here. That's a tall order the way Josh Allen, Stefon Diggs and the Bills are going.

Los Angeles Rams (10-6) at Seattle (12-4)

A third go-around for the NFC West rivals who split during the regular season.

Both have strong defenses and have been spotty on offense, LA far more so than Seattle.

The Rams clinched their spot in the playoffs without the inconsistent Jared Goff (thumb surgery) at quarterback. The Seahawks have no issues at that position with Russell Wilson, though his first half of the season was far better than the last two months.

Tampa Bay (11-5) at Washington (7-9)

For sure, the Washington story is uplifting, particularly the way Rivera is leading a change in culture for a franchise so desperately needing it. And the last three teams to capture division titles without a winning record also pulled off upsets in the wild-card round.

Don't look for much of that in prime time, not with Tom Brady leading the Buccaneers, who are balanced

enough to threaten anyone. You remember Brady. If not, tune in to this one and see him likely dismantle Washington's impressive but inexperienced defense.

SUNDAY

Tennessee (11-5) at Baltimore (11-5)

A year ago, the Titans rode Derrick Henry's rushing power, agility and underrated speed to a stunning upset in Baltimore. They still are riding Henry, who became the eighth player to gain 2,000 yards on the ground in a season. Tennessee also can throw the ball better than it could last season.

Alas, the Titans barely play any defense. So, with the Ravens having a more diverse but just as effective running game and a sturdy D — not to mention the memories of that beat-down last January — Henry and Co. have an even big-

ger task ahead in Baltimore this time.

Chicago (8-8) at New Orleans (12-4)

The other NFC interloper, perhaps, the Bears almost belong in the Least, uh, East. They went from 5-1 to 5-7 before finishing strongly enough to sneak in. Their defense is dangerous if not quite Monsters of the Midway, and when they run the ball well, they can compete.

If the Saints get some of their running backs back from the COVID-19 list — particularly scoring machine Alvin Kamara — they will be heavily favored. This could be Drew Brees' last shot at a second NFL title, too. And New Orleans has a defense to match Chicago's.

Cleveland (11-5) at Pittsburgh (12-4)

This had to be the topper for the weekend's action. One of the grand rivalries of the sport, and it was just played out in Week 17 — albeit with the Steelers resting a bunch of regulars. Yet Pittsburgh pushed Cleveland to the limit before the Browns snapped the league's longest playoff drought, dating to 2003.

Can the Browns win again in the wild-card matchup? Sure, as long as they get their ample running game going and don't have another COVID-19 outbreak like the one that hit in the last two weeks. The Steelers have lost four of their last five, but they also have won 17 straight at home against Cleveland. Ben Roethlisberger will be back and he's 23-2-1 in his career against the Browns. □

Al-Attiyah wins Dakar Rally stage 2 and takes overall lead

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Nasser Al-Attiyah won the second stage of the Dakar Rally as the leaders took on a familiar look on Monday. Al-Attiyah, who started 10th on the 457-kilometer (284-mile) sandy special in southern Saudi Arabia from Bisha to Wadi ad-Dawasir, took over the stage lead after about 300 kilometers and beat home

Stephane Peterhansel by 2 1/2 minutes.

Carlos Sainz, the defending champion who opened the stage, slipped to sixth but rallied and finished third, more than nine minutes off the pace.

Peterhansel took the race lead overall, his Mini teammate Sainz was 6 1/2 minutes back in second, and Al-Attiyah's Toyota was

third, nine minutes down. Between the three of them, they have won 10 of the last 11 Dakars, and are favored to win the second race in Saudi.

"Yesterday, we lost a lot of time because we opened the way and it was not really good for us and we didn't take risks," Al-Attiyah said. "But today we went flat out and ev-

erything is working very, very well." Sebastien Loeb, the nine-time world rally champion who skipped the Dakar last year after finishing third in 2019, improved from 17th to sixth overall. In the motorbike category, Joan Barreda dominated from the first time checkpoint and won. Ricky Brabec, the defending champion, was

second, and that's also how they lined up overall. Ross Branch, fourth on the stage, was third overall, six minutes back.

Toby Price of Australia, the stage one winner, fell to 15th overall, and Matthias Walkner of Austria, the 2018 champion, lost more than two hours repairing a mechanical problem and fell from third to 46th. □